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ABSTRACT

This study examined a sample of 24 Puerto Rican families from two kindergarten and first grade bilingual classes at the Blackstone School in the South End of Boston. The typical family in the sample was headed by a woman aged 32.9, with three preschool and elementary school age children. The typical mother arrived from Puerto Rico in 1974, and has lived in her current community a total of ten years. Her formal education is below a high school diploma and she is receiving some form of public assistance. Four sets of interviews were conducted: the first set with 24 families, the second with 18, the third with 16, and the fourth and final set of interviews with 13 families. Data were gathered on topics from basic demographic information to history of migration, help-seeking patterns, and perceptions of the community and schools. These interviews provided baseline data and demographic information with which to compare the sample population with that of Boston and the United States. The data suggest that the natural support systems of Puerto Rican families in this study are very limited, and that they identify the school which their children attend as a major resource in their lives. (Contains 39 references.) (Author)

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CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

USE OF PUERTO RICAN NATURAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND SCHOOLS

PS 024158

Melvin Delgado
Hilda Rivera

Report No. 34 / March 1996

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Use of Puerto Rican Natural Support Systems as a Bridge Between Community and Schools

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Boston University School of Social Work

Report No. 34

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CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

The nation's schools must do more to improve the education of all children, but schools cannot do this alone. More will be accomplished if families and communities work with children, with each other, and with schools to promote successful students.

The mission of this Center is to conduct research, evaluations, policy analyses, and dissemination to produce new and useful knowledge about how families, schools, and communities influence student motivation, learning, and development. A second important goal is to improve the connections between and among these major social institutions.

Two research programs guide the Center's work: the Program on the Early Years of Childhood, covering children aged 0-10 through the elementary grades; and the Program on the Years of Early and Late Adolescence, covering youngsters aged 11-19 through the middle and high school grades.

Research on family, school, and community connections must be conducted to understand more about all children and all families, not just those who are economically and educationally advantaged or already connected to school and community resources. The Center's projects pay particular attention to the diversity of family cultures and backgrounds and to the diversity in family, school, and community practices that support families in helping children succeed across the years of childhood and adolescence. Projects also examine policies at the federal, state, and local levels that produce effective partnerships.

A third program of Institutional Activities includes a wide range of dissemination projects to extend the Center's national leadership. The Center's work will yield new information, practices, and policies to promote partnerships among families, communities, and schools to benefit children's learning.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined a sample of twenty-four Puerto Rican families from two kindergarten and first grade bilingual classes at the Blackstone School in the South End of Boston. The typical family in the sample was headed by a woman aged 32.9, with three preschool and elementary school aged children. She arrived from Puerto Rico in 1974, and has lived in her current community a total of ten years. Her formal education is below a high school diploma and she is receiving some form of public assistance.

Four sets of interviews were conducted: the first set with twenty-four families, the second with eighteen, the third with sixteen, and the fourth and final set of interviews with thirteen families. Data were gathered on topics from basic demographic information to history of migration, help-seeking patterns, and perceptions of the community and schools. These interviews provided baseline data and demographic information with which to compare the sample population with that of Boston and the United States. The data suggest that the natural support systems of Puerto Rican families in this study are very limited, and they identify the school that their children attend as a major resource in their lives.

I. DESCRIPTION OF SITE, SAMPLE, AND INTERVIEWS

DESCRIPTION OF SITES AND SAMPLES

History of South End

In the 1850s, a small strip of land on the edge of downtown Boston was enlarged by massive landfill and became the neighborhood now known as the South End. After building started on this land, large numbers of middle-class families began moving out of the more crowded downtown area of Boston to the fashionable brownstone bowfront row houses that lined the streets of the South End. Then, after the depression of 1873, the neighborhood began to change as the working class began to move into the community. In turn, the middle-class families moved to the new Back Bay and to the close suburbs that had become accessible by streetcar. The new residents, largely Irish workers, shopkeepers, and contractors, could not afford to keep servants as had the more affluent residents before them, and they converted many large houses into rooming establishments. The South End eventually developed as the largest rooming house district in the United States. Today, nearly 94% of the housing units in the community are part of multiple unit complexes. Because most of these homes do not provide kitchens, great numbers of inexpensive cafeterias and coffee houses opened in the South End, employing hundreds of workers. Many tailor shops and laundries also served the community. After the Great Depression, however, most of the little restaurants were closed and barrooms and liquor stores were opened. By the 1950s, the neighborhood had begun to develop a reputation, especially in the media, as a "slum."

In the 1960s, urban renewal programs often meant demolition instead of rehabilitation. Many residential buildings were torn down by the city. Residents of the South End started a movement to preserve their homes and fight those who wanted to destroy entire city blocks. In recent years, young professionals have moved into the area because it is convenient to downtown and because there has been a revival of the appreciation of the bowfront houses. Many of these houses have been restored to their original beauty, but this gentrification has also caused economic problems. The neighborhood is no longer affordable to many families, some of whom have been there for generations.

Before the urban renewal began in the late fifties, most of the residents of the South End were poor. There were African-Americans, Chinese, Greeks, Irish, Jews, Portuguese, Syrians, West Indians, and in later years Native Americans and Puerto Ricans. Relations

between racial and ethnic groups were good, probably partially due to the fact that there were not large differences in socioeconomic status. The Puerto Rican families that moved to the South End, however, were probably poorer as a whole, because many American employers brought Puerto Ricans to the mainland as cheap labor in temporary jobs. As Puerto Ricans first started moving to the South End in large numbers during the sixties, their principal challenge was economic.

The South End Today

As of 1990, the Latino population of the South End was 3,729, representing a little over 12% of the South End population. Of these residents, approximately 73% identified themselves as Puerto Rican. The remainder of the South End is 43% Whites, 20% African-Americans, and 25% "Other." Census data show that the Latino population of the South End rose by about 22% between 1980 and 1990, while the White population rose by 32%. During this same period of time, the African-American population decreased by 12%. Approximately 59% of the South End's population lives below the poverty level.

Although the community is still extremely diverse culturally, the perception within the community is that the different cultural groups interact little with each other and have their own institutions and community leaders to rely on for support and guidance. The different groups in the South End -- defined by race, class, and sexual orientation -- are also geographically defined. Different sections of the South End are home to different groups of people. Villa Victoria, one of three subsidized housing developments in the neighborhood, is the center of activity in the Latino community. It is a low-to-moderate income housing community that is currently home to over 3,000 residents. The development is attractive and well-kept with colorful murals, parks, and playgrounds. Several Latino-owned businesses are close by on busy Tremont Street.

One of the strengths of the South End is that it is very accessible to different areas of Boston. It is very close to the financial district and Government Center of downtown Boston, and it borders on Chinatown, home to much of the Asian-American population in Boston. There are many busy streets running through the South End and Interstate 93 borders the community. In addition, the MBTA (Boston's public transportation system) serves the community with its Orange Line as well as several bus routes. This access is important for those in the community who do not own an automobile.

The most influential entity in the Latino community is probably *Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion* (IBA -- Puerto Rican Tenants in Action). IBA is a private, non-profit organization that was established in the South End in 1968 by mostly Puerto Rican residents of the community whose neighborhoods were threatened by "urban renewal." These founders started off a multi-year campaign with the rallying cry, *"No nos mudaremos de la Parcela 19"* ("We shall not be moved from Parcel 19") and eventually won the right to control the process of redeveloping the community. As a result, Villa Victoria was created. The self-described mission of IBA is to foster the human, social, and economic well-being of Villa Victoria residents, to promote and advocate for Latinos citywide, and to perpetuate the rich Latino cultural and artistic heritage. The leaders within this organization have become trusted leaders in the community at large.

IBA is not only influential in the Latino community in the South End because of its positive history and leadership, but because it offers a wide range of services and initiatives that reach out to residents of all ages. These include a Community Development Division that works on housing and economic issues; the Areyto Division, which is an arts and culture project that promotes cultural awareness in schools, cultural pride in the community, Latino artists from the community (bringing Puerto Rican artists from the Island), and South End celebrations and events; and a large human services program that includes education, job counseling, gang intervention, health education, AIDS prevention, drop-out prevention, mental health/family support, and elder care, among other services.

Bilingual and bicultural medical and social services are provided to the Latino community in the South End by several local institutions. Boston City Hospital is a large public hospital located very close to South End. Patients covered by Medicaid make up over 50% of the patients served there. United South End Settlements (USES), which for more than 100 years has provided social services for children and adults in the community, facilitates housing and neighborhood development, provides family support, runs the multi-cultural AIDS coalition, and provides day care and summer camps for children. The South End Community Health Center focuses services on people of color in the South End, providing medical as well as mental health services and the WIC program. The Cardinal Cushing Center provides counseling, GED, and ESL classes. *Casa del Sol* provides educational services such as GED classes.

Other institutions that are influential in the Latino community in the South End are the Catholic, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches, neighborhood associations for every 8-10 block

area, and the small Latino-owned and operated groceries in each neighborhood (Gianos, 1993).

SAMPLE SELECTION AND DESCRIPTION

Interview Methods

Step 1: The sample was selected from a list provided by teachers in the Blackstone Community school's bilingual education program.

Step 2: A letter (Spanish and English) was mailed informing the parents of the nature of the study.

Step 3: A telephone call followed within one week explaining the study and answering any questions the parents had.

Step 4: An appointment was then made for a home visit.

Step 5: During the home visit, parents were asked which language they preferred to be interviewed in and whether or not they had any further questions.

Step 6: Their rights were explained and they signed a consent form.

Step 7: The interview was conducted and respondents were provided with the name and telephone number of the interviewer in case they had any questions. Each interview lasted approximately fifty minutes. An incentive of $25.00 was given to each family after completion of the interview to compensate them for their time and effort.

The Study Sample Compared to Puerto Ricans in Boston and in the Nation

Puerto Ricans in the United States number approximately 2.4 million, which is 11% of the Latino population in this country and approximately one percent of the total U.S. population. National demographic statistics point to several key factors and trends. This ethnic group is rapidly expanding, and as a result of dispersal and changes in migration patterns, it has spread throughout the United States. Almost fifty percent of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. reside in New York State (48.7%), most of them living in New York City. However, sizable Puerto Rican communities can be found in most of the fifty states.

The state of Massachusetts' Latino community is predominantly Puerto Rican (52.9%). Puerto Ricans and "Other Latinos" are the largest Latino subgroups in the state, accounting respectively for 2.5% and 1.9% of the total population. "Other Latinos" come from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Central and South America (Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1993).

TABLE 1

LATINO POPULATION BY AGE FOR BOSTON, STUDY SAMPLE, AND NATION

CATEGORY	Boston 1990 Percentage	Study Sample Percentage	Nation Percentage
Under 16 Years Old	28.8%	35.1%	31.0%
16-24 "	20.9%	21.2%	16.0%
25-34 "	22.9%	17.7%	18.2%
35-44 "	12.8%	6.9%	15.3%
45-54 "	4.0%	0.0%	5.9%
55-64 "	4.0%	0.0%	5.9%
65+ "	3.8%	0.0%	4.7%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

NOTE: Percentages for Boston and the nation are provided by the Boston Development Authority (1993).

The Puerto Rican study sample consists of twenty-four households. The sample is slightly younger than the general population of Latinos in Boston or the nation, reflecting the study's focus on families with young school children. The research sample also is less well educated than the general Latino population and includes more single female-headed households. Specifically, youths 16 years or under represent the largest group in the Boston 1990, study sample, and national population. The family size of a national sample of Puerto Ricans is similar to the study sample, with an average of 3.37 persons per household. The national percent of single female householders is 43.3%, considerably lower than our sample of 90.6%. The national median age of adults is 26.7, similar to that in our sample. The percent of the total U.S. Puerto Rican population to have completed high school is 58.0%, considerably higher than the graduate rate of 28.6% for our sample (Gaston Institute, 1992, 1994).

The typical family in our sample is headed by a woman aged 32.9, with three pre-school and elementary-school aged children. She arrived from Puerto Rico in 1974, and has lived in her current community a total of ten years. Her formal education is below a high school diploma and she is receiving some form of public assistance. Mothers worked outside the home in only three out of the twenty-four households in this study. Her language of preference is Spanish and this is reflected in her dealings with the outside world. She prefers Spanish television, radio, and newspapers for entertainment.

Her primary social support comes from 1.3 persons -- primarily close family members. Although she knows her next door neighbors, she does not feel comfortable seeking their assistance. Her involvement in the human service system is also very limited, although her needs and those of her family are quite extensive.

She is actively involved in visiting her children's school and plays an active part in helping them with their homework. Although economically poor, and dealing with the trials and tribulations of life in the inner-city, she is satisfied with her family's current living situation, and has high hopes for her children's future. The family is not planning to move to another city or return permanently to Puerto Rico.

Sample Disposition

A total of forty-five Puerto Rican families were selected as potential participants from two kindergarten and first grade bilingual classes at the Blackstone School in the South End. From this number, twenty-four (sample goal) agreed to participate in the study. Five families of the initial forty-five refused to participate; twenty-one could not be contacted as a result of unlisted numbers (N=5), no telephone (N=9), or discontinued telephones (N=7). Efforts were made to obtain correct telephone numbers/addresses, including contacting the emergency numbers that the families provided to the school. The first set of interviews was conducted with the twenty-four families.

The second set of interviews involved eighteen families. Six out of our twenty-four Puerto Rican families had either moved out of the area (N=3) (one returned to Puerto Rico and did not leave a forwarding address) or obtained unlisted telephone numbers (N=3) and did not respond to written communication or repeated visits to the home.

The third set of interviews were successful in following sixteen families (two families moved out of the city); and the fourth and final set of interviews involved thirteen families (two families moved and left no forwarding addresses and one did not respond to repeated efforts to contact them.

The methods used to contact families in interviews two, three and four were similar to those used in the first interview: a letter was mailed to the sample (English/Spanish), followed by a telephone call to set up an appointment for a home visit. However, the drop of twenty-five percent between interview one and two occurred in a relatively short period of time (four months), and highlights the difficulties in obtaining and maintaining a sample in urban-based research. Dropoffs in the remaining two interviews were not as dramatic.

OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEWS

Questions were asked in different interviews to obtain a complete picture of respondents. Some respondents did not answer some of the questions, so the numbers of responses for items vary. The interview questions for the second through fourth interviews were developed based upon the answers obtained at the prior interview. Consequently, each set of interviews built upon the previous interview.

First Set of Interviews

The initial interviews were completed during the Spring of 1993 and consisted of seventy-eight questions. Data were gathered on a wide range of topics, from basic demographic information to history of migration, help-seeking patterns, and perceptions of the community and schools. These interviews provided baseline data and demographic information with which to compare the sample population with that of Boston and the United States.

The responses to the initial interview raised questions about how the sample viewed their environment; opinions of what constitutes a "perfect" school and community were sought to compare with their opinions of their current living situations. Their relative isolation from formal and natural support systems raised concerns about a population in need but not receiving support.

Second Set of Interviews

The second set of interviews was conducted in January and February, 1994. Forty questions were asked covering the following topic areas: (1) Puerto Rico Related; (2) Current Community (3) School and Career Applications; (4) Ethnic Identity and Language; and (5) Natural Support System Specific. Questions were developed based on respondents' answers to the initial interviews (baseline data) and sought to clarify or expand the earlier questions and provide information on new areas.

The second set of interviews sought more detail about and clarification of what constitutes support and how to access it when it is needed. These interviews delved into

women's aspirations for their children, facilitating/hindering factors in educational attainment, and the role of ethnic identity in this process.

Third Set of Interviews

In a deviation from the initial and second set of interviews, those in this sample were telephoned to set up an appointment for a home visit without first being contacted by mail. The third interviews were conducted from May to July, 1994. Twenty-three questions were asked about (1) school-community relations (methods for improving collaboration); and (2) natural support systems. These two broad categories were sub-divided into other sections. The third set of interviews explored in greater depths ways of improving collaboration among all parties, details pertaining to the nature and extent of support systems, importance of contact with other ethnic groups, help-seeking patterns, literacy (English and Spanish), perceptions of current economic status, and plans for moving to another community.

Natural Support System Interviews

At the end of the third interview, respondents were asked to name one person who was part of their support system who could be interviewed as part of this study. Only one respondent stated that they had no one but themselves. The other respondents indicated a person who could be contacted, along with a telephone number, and a willingness to speak with them about cooperating with this study.

Fourteen natural support respondents out of a total of sixteen possible respondents participated in this phase of the research. Interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted approximately 30 minutes. All but one of the interviews were conducted in Spanish.

Responses by the support system members, in turn, influenced development of questions for the fourth and final family interviews conducted during January and February 1995.

Fourth Set of Interviews

The final interview consisted of a total of twenty-five questions that gathered further information on school-community relations and family relations and natural support systems. This interview clarified various aspects of community-school/natural support systems relationships, and assessed the impact that the study had on the participants. In addition, an effort was made to capture what changes, if any, had transpired with the families over two years.

II. FINDINGS

COMMUNITY (Puerto Rico and Boston)

Puerto Rico Related Themes

The first interview gathered data on definitions of community in Puerto Rico and the aspects respondents most fondly remembered about the Island. The responses fell into five categories: (1) environment (N=12), e.g., warm weather, palm trees, beaches; (2) familial relationships (N=8), e.g., relatives and friends left behind; (3) cultural factors (N=2), e.g., celebrations, buildings and plazas with cultural symbols, parties; (4) friendly people (N=5); and (5) overall safety (N=1), particularly for children who can play outside unsupervised.

The second set of interviews asked questions focused on family plans to return to Puerto Rico. For example, respondents were asked how long they had initially planned to stay in the United States, and whether their plans to return to Puerto Rico changed since the last interview. Only one of the respondents left Puerto Rico knowing that she would never return to live there. The largest number (N=6) planned to stay in the United States one year before returning. Others planned to stay in the United States two to three years (N=2) and five years (N=1). One respondent planned on staying one to three months. This question was not applicable to two respondents who did not have any specific time period in mind before returning, and three respondents who were born in the United States.

Five respondents indicated that they still wished to return to Puerto Rico at some future date. Their reasons were familial in nature (N=3), Spanish language makes

communication easier (N=1), and environment/friendly people (N=1). Reasons for staying in the United States touched on children being born here (N=2), health reasons such as better medical care (N=2), family is here (N=2), economics (N=1), and high crime rate in Puerto Rico (N=1).

Migration Patterns

Of the twenty-four families in our sample, only three were born in the United States (New York and Boston); the rest were born in Puerto Rico. The average family left Puerto Rico in 1974 with migration occurring over four decades: 1960, 3; 1970, 10; 1980, 7; 1990, 1. This migration pattern parallels the period of Puerto Rican population growth in Boston. The vast majority of the families left rural areas of the Island (N=17), compared to urban areas (N=4).

Migration was a difficult process. A high number of the parents in the sample (N=13) left Puerto Rico with one of their parents. Mother and father with children was the second most frequently cited category (N=6). Two respondents noted a single parent, relative, and children. Interviewees left Puerto Rico for four major reasons: economic (N=9); social (N=3); familial (N=4), and education (N=5). Three respondents did not provide a reason. The vast majority of the sample lived with relatives upon initial arrival (N=18), followed by living with friends (N=2), and alone (N=1). Boston was the primary port of entry into the United States (N=15), followed by New York City (N=5), and Hartford, Connecticut. (N=1). The families in our sample have lived in their current community from one to five years (N=9); six to nine years (N=4); ten to nineteen years (N=9); and twenty years or more (N=2).

Connectedness to Puerto Rico

Only two families returned to live in Puerto Rico after having resettled in the United States, and these families eventually returned again to the United States. More than half (N=15) of the parents have not visited Puerto Rico since their initial departure. The children, however, had a higher likelihood of returning to visit (N=14).

Current Community

The importance of developing a better understanding of how respondents viewed community was underscored during all sets of interviews. This perspective is particularly critical in setting the context for examining formal and natural support help-seeking patterns. This section of the interviews gathered more detailed information on perceptions of community and comfort levels, as well as help-seeking patterns involving key formal institutions. Questions covered three dimensions: attachment to community, use of formal services, and perceptions of community and attitudes of the general community toward Puerto Ricans.

1. *Attachment to Community.* Responses in the first interview indicated that half of the respondents (N=12) are involved in community-related activities, including serving as a member of the housing council, parents committee, crime watch, teen and parents committee, family support group, youth programs, and festival committee. These twelve individuals indicated that they did feel as if they were a part of the community. They have knowledge of the community and of participating in Hispanic activities/events. Two other respondents indicated a desire to be involved in community activities.

The majority (N=14) indicated a willingness to have their children involved in community activities so that children can make friends in the neighborhood, keep busy and out of trouble, get better social/recreational benefits, and have opportunities for positive learning experiences. Half of the families (N=12) participated in sporting activities.

Only one of the eighteen respondents in the second interview indicated that she would allow her children to play in the street unsupervised by an adult. Other parents noted that city streets are dangerous (N=7), accidents are possible (N=2), and strangers are not to be trusted (N=2).

2. Perception of Community and Attitudes of the General Community Toward Puerto Ricans. One section of the second set of interviews focused on respondent perceptions of the community. When asked what themes come to mind when "neighborhood" is mentioned, respondents most frequently identified violence (N=7) and the joy of being with one's own group (N=6). The latter group lived in a housing development created by Puerto Ricans (Villa Victoria). No privacy (N=2), impersonal nature of the big city (N=2), depression (N=1), and bad environment (N=1) were also terms linked to community. To these families

an ideal community in Boston would have the following qualities: safe environment (N=9), united people/friendly neighbors (N=5), sense of community spirit (N=1), clean streets (N=1), and respect for human rights (N=1).

When asked if they believed there was racism in the community, ten said no, seven said yes, and one indicated she did not know. Those who responded in the affirmative indicated that the greatest source of racism emanated from African-Americans toward Puerto Ricans. Only one respondent noted school and job discrimination toward Puerto Ricans. Questions also focused on multi-cultural relations, in an attempt to better understand the desire of Puerto Ricans to have closer contact with other ethnic/racial groups. Only four respondents indicated that they did not have friends who were non-Puerto Rican. The remaining sample (N=14) indicated that although most of their friends were Puerto Rican, they did have friends who were non-Puerto Rican. In placing friendship networks within a community context, all respondents said "yes" to enjoying living with other ethnic/racial groups. They listed the opportunity to learn from other groups concerning various aspects of culture (i.e., food, music, history) as the most valuable outcome of this interchange. All respondents stated that they wanted their children to have friends from other cultures for similar reasons.

Use of Transportation

Eleven families indicated they owned a car. Almost all of the families (N=22) noted that they used public transportation. Their location in an urban area made it relatively easy to walk to various settings or take public transportation. The high cost of owning and maintaining a car was cited as a major reason not to own one.

Voting Patterns

Data indicate that this population does not often exercise its right to vote in elections. Only eight out of twenty-four respondents stated that they were registered to vote, with six having voted in the last election. Prior to coming to the United States, more voted in Puerto Rico (N=12). Ten families had not voted in Puerto Rico elections (this question was not applicable to three parents who were born in the United States).

Cultural Connectedness

Cultural connectedness was measured through a series of questions focused on culture-related activities. Only nine families indicated that they participated in Puerto Rican organizations (mainly *Festival Puertorriqueno* and *Festival Betances*) or the IBA board. Less than half of the families (N=11) attended Puerto Rican community dances and festivals. However, over two-thirds (N=19) conducted birthday, Christmas, and Three King's Day celebrations in their home.

Satisfaction with Current Situation

A set of questions in the first interview examined respondents' satisfaction with their current living situations. In examining why they moved to Boston and the South End, respondents said they were influenced by a desire to live close to family (N=11) and friends (N=1). Nine applied for and were accepted into public housing. Three indicated that they were placed in public housing and did not have any choice, and two respondents moved there because of low rents. Interestingly, almost all respondents are happy with their community. Reasons included having low rents, being close to stores and health centers, being close to family/friends, and having a large number of Puerto Ricans living in the community. When asked whether they would want to move to another city in Massachusetts, sixteen indicated no, seven said yes, and one was not sure. When asked if they would like to move to another state, the vast majority indicated no (N=19). Five indicated a preference for Florida.

Language Preference

The majority of the first interview sample (22 of 24) preferred Spanish as their primary language. Twenty-one spoke only Spanish in the home; the remaining three spoke both Spanish and English. A similar preference for Spanish was prevalent in the use of media: 20 read Spanish newspapers, 20 listened to Spanish radio, and 23 watched Spanish language television. The preference for Spanish was evident throughout all sets of interviews, including those families with natural support systems.

Responding to two questions in the third interview (N=16), almost all of the respondents (N=15) indicated they were comfortable reading and writing in Spanish; a slightly lower number (N=12) indicated a similar comfort level in English.

Ethnic Identity and Language

The second set of interviews examined language preference for children and ethnic identity. When asked what language they would prefer their children to speak best, ten respondents said both English and Spanish equally; Spanish or English alone were noted by four respondents each. Ten respondents also indicated they wished to have their child return permanently to Puerto Rico to live upon attaining adulthood; five stated no to this question, and three indicated that the child should ultimately decide.

When asked how they define themselves ethnically, Puerto Rican was the most frequently cited response (N=9), followed by Hispanic/Latino (N=7), and Puerto Rican/Hispanic (N=2). Respondents were then asked how they want their child to identify ethnically upon reaching adulthood. This question resulted in a wider range of responses: Puerto Rican-Hispanic or Latino (N=10), Hispanic-American (N=2), Latin American (N=1), American (N=1), and didn't know (N=3).

Asked to identify who they believed the child admired most in the family and community, respondents produced an extensive list: grandmother (N=6), mother (N=5), aunt (N=2), teacher (N=2), both parents (N=2), older siblings (N=1), do not know (N=4). Some respondents selected more than one individual. Sixteen respondents, on the other hand, could not name anyone in the community who has inspired their child (one noted a counselor and another did not know).

The question of what, if anything, had they done with their children to make them more aware of being Puerto Rican/Hispanic/Latino, highlighted the multi-faceted aspect of cultural identity: (1) reading books on Puerto Rican culture and history (N=4); (2) attending Puerto Rican culture and history events (N=8); (3) teaching them to cook and eat Puerto Rican meals (N=13) ; (4) studying a map of Puerto Rico (N=2); (5) watching Spanish television (N=3); (6) listening and dancing to Puerto Rican music (N=7); and (7) teaching children how to play dominos (N=2), which is a common cultural activity.

CHILDREN'S SCHOOLING

A set of questions in the first interview explored the family's relationship with their children's school or schools, including their opinions on the assignment to or choice of the Blackstone Community School, parent satisfaction, and other options concerning the education of the child in our study sample. More than half of the children in the sample families do not attend the same school (N=17). Six families, however, have all of their children in the Blackstone Community School; one family only had one child.

Respondents were asked if they selected this school and if so, why. Most (N=20) indicated that they did so and that this was very important to them; four noted the school was assigned to them without requesting it. In Boston most parents choose the schools to which their children are assigned, but not all schools have bilingual education programs that meet a student's needs. Reasons for selection included the quality of instruction (teachers, principal, homework), proximity to home, bilingual program, and physical condition of the building (clean and modern).

All of the families (N=24) stated that they were happy with the school. This pattern was consistent across all sets of interviews. Most families reported that their children also liked the school (N=21). Three respondents said their children did not like the school because of too much homework. Parents were largely delighted with the children's teacher (N=23). They also approved of the principal and staff -- friendly, knowledgeable, accessible, and bilingual. The parents' ability to identify with school personnel, the large number of Latino families in the school, accessibility of school (geographical and cultural), and an "atmosphere" of acceptance all contributed to positive feelings.

When questioned about which language they used when visiting the school, eighteen said Spanish, five said both Spanish and English, and one indicated English. All of the respondents preferred bilingual education for their children. This provided their children with the linguistic/cultural capabilities to return to Puerto Rico or to stay in the United States and be marketable for future jobs.

Another set of questions focused on parent comfort and involvement in school-related activities. As noted, almost all of the parents (N=22) felt comfortable visiting the school. A similar majority (N=18) visited the school daily to drop off or pick up their children. One-third of the families (N=8) always attended parent meetings; seven families indicated they do

so sometimes depending on the topic; nine families said they never attended (three of whom had conflicts with job schedule). Parents (N=12) suggested that the school undertake more activities/events involving the broader community, not just families with children in the school, as a way of breaking down barriers between school and the greater community.

When questioned about who does homework with the child, twenty-two parents indicated they helped their children. Only two said the child did it alone. Finally, when parents were asked what success in school means, three important themes emerged: (1) proper behavior -- particularly towards the teacher; (2) high grades and achievement; and (3) reading ability.

SCHOOL AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS FOR CHILDREN

A series of questions to parents in the second interview focused on future educational and career goals for their child. When asked whether they wanted their child to graduate from high school or obtain a G.E.D diploma, all respondents (N=18) preferred a high school diploma. Their rationales for this preference included: "they learn more," "GED is an easy way out," "great accomplishment," "represents 12 years of hard work." When asked "Would you like your child to go to college or get vocational training after high school?", fourteen respondents stated college; three said the child will ultimately decide; one was not sure; and one said it wasn't necessary to continue past high school.

Responses about what their child needs in order to get an advanced education clustered on the following categories: family support (N=11); discipline (N=3); school support (N=3); personal strengths (N=2); resist negative peer pressure (N=2); focus on skills (N=2); and attainment of minimum requirement of a high school diploma (N=1).

When asked what comes to mind when someone mentions that their child is successful, the majority (N=14) believed that meant the child had a good education and good employment prospects. Two respondents said that it meant their child was happy; one said the child was talented; and two could not answer this question. The responses to this question did not differ in the final interview.

Questions were asked to determine the nature of helping/hindering forces related to educational-career achievement. When asked to list the reasons their child might achieve their

aspirations, four reasons were given: family support (N=13); child worked hard (N=5); and child's talent and innate resources (N=3), and positive peer pressure (2).

When asked to list the reasons why their child might fail to achieve the educational-career goals, the majority (N=13) indicated lack of interest on the part of the child. Other responses included lack of resources (N=2), school system not supportive (N=2), negative peer-pressure (N=2), lack of father's support (N=1), and did not know (N=3).

In describing the "perfect school," interviewees highlighted personnel, structure, and the educational process: good teaching and support services (N=12), safe and clean environment (N=3), preparation for life (N=3), parent involvement (N=1), special education and individual attention (N=1), and "like a private school" (N=1). Respondents were asked who in the school they would turn to if they needed help with their child. Both teacher and principal were mentioned (N=11), followed by family members (N=8), with the rest mentioning counselor or social workers (N=2), priest/minister (N=1), and support group (N=1). However, when asked if they felt comfortable talking with someone in the school about a personal or family problem, the majority (N=13) said "no" for fear of being misunderstood and then being reported to the Department of Social Services as abusing/neglecting parents. Five respondents said "yes" they would feel comfortable talking with a teacher, principal, or counselor.

School-Community Relations

The third set of interviews gathered information on how to improve school-community relations. Some questions focused on how collaboration can be initiated and facilitated. When respondents were asked if they believed parents should be involved in the education of their children, all respondents answered in the affirmative. Respondents indicated a need to know what their children were learning in school and cited the benefits of learning from their children. They noted that the school could make it easier to involve parents in child-related activities with increased personal contact, workshops on parenting ("Being a parent is very hard"), increased parent-teacher conferences, festivals for parents/families, and special services for single parents.

Respondents stated that parent-focused workshops (e.g., life skills, behavior management, drug resistance) would attract them to the school. Also, volunteer

opportunities (e.g., field trips, classroom instructional activities) would provide avenues for meaningful involvement.

Respondents were asked how teachers could play a role involving the community in children's education. They mentioned improved communication (more correspondence, telephone calls) and more personal contact. One parent noted that it would be very helpful to have teachers visit the student's home. However, one parent suggested greater contact with teachers should take place at school, saying "It is the parent's responsibility to initiate and maintain contact with the teacher." One respondent indicated that children's art could be displayed in community-based settings such as libraries and grocery stores as a means of informing the community of school-related projects.

In examining a different aspect of school-community relations, a question was asked about how parents can help their children's education. All respondents provided suggestions: helping with homework, attending school activities, communicating with school whenever there was a concern. When asked who parents could turn to when they could not help their children with homework, respondents covered the following groups: older siblings (N=8), other relatives (N=7), professionals (N=5), such as a librarian or after-school counselors, and teacher (N=3). One respondent stated that if she could not help her child, then there was no one she could turn to for assistance.

In the final interview, respondents were asked about the nature of their involvement in the school, and about how community leaders and social service providers could be more active in education. A majority (N=11) of the respondents indicated that during the past year they were more actively involved in their children's school. This involvement not only reflected increased presence in their children's classrooms, but also availing themselves of educational/recreational opportunities in the school. In short, the school's influence in their lives had increased over the years of this study.

All of the respondents indicated that they would encourage and welcome teacher participation in community events and activities. The responses were very similar to those in the initial interview two years earlier. Some noted, however, that they understood the demands of the job on the teacher's time and energy but believed that increased participation would benefit both child and teacher. The latter would have a better appreciation and understanding of the child's community.

The majority (N=10) of the final-interview respondents indicated that community leaders and human service providers must have a greater awareness and presence in the school. This could be accomplished by providing greater opportunities for community or parent leaders to be involved on committees and in other aspects of the school. Human service providers, in turn, could be encouraged to participate by providing space for them to deliver services in the school.

Parents, according to the respondents, must be involved in all aspects of their children's education and have a presence in the school to show that they care about education. However, having children in many different schools, some at great geographical distances from home because of parent choice and desegregation, seriously limits parental involvement in some schools.

III. FORMAL AND NATURAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Questions on natural support systems assessed the extent and degree of help that is available to and accessed by the sample families. In the first interview, respondents were questioned about who they would turn to when they had a problem in various areas. Table 2 shows their responses.

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO SEEK HELP FROM NATURAL OR FORMAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS (N=24)

Problem Area	Natural Support Systems	Formal/Human Service Org.	No Response
1. Personal	22	0	2
2. Emotional	22	0	2
3. Health	21	9	3
4. Financial	24	0	0
5. School	21	9	3
6. Interpreter	19	5	0

NOTE: Some respondents indicated both natural and formal support systems.

The families in the sample prefer to seek assistance from their natural support systems. Of those seeking help from natural support systems, most (N=21) named a relative -- parent, sibling, aunt/uncle as the person to whom they would turn. Only a few mentioned someone in the community (N=6) -- a neighbor (N=3), older-adult child (N=1), or pastor (N=2).

When asked in the fourth set of interviews to describe the qualities of a good helper, respondents noted the following: ability to listen (N=12); good sense of humor (N=11); excellent communication skills in Spanish and English (N=10); and a willingness to help at anytime (N=8). The respondents were asked if they were helpers to others. All stated that they were helpers and addressed a wide range of information, expressive, and instrumental needs on which they helped others.

PATTERNS OF SEEKING HELP FROM FORMAL SYSTEMS

Public Services and Use of Interpreters

Questions were asked during the first set of interviews about the need for public services and the use of interpreters. Nine respondents have been assisted by bilingual/bicultural social workers or counselors in public human service agencies in the past year. Of those needing services, almost all (N=8) noted that they needed help meeting paperwork requirements for obtaining health, social, and educational services. The majority of the sample attend agency appointments alone (N=16) or with a family member (N=5). This family member usually helps with language interpreting or is very familiar with entitlement.

Health Conditions and Use of Services

The first set of interviews asked a series of personal questions assessing the physical and emotional health of the families in the sample. Eight families indicated that they or a close relative suffered from some form of disability. Six additional families indicated some members of their immediate or extended family received mental health services; five of these six families indicated that family members had a problem with alcohol or other drug abuse and three of these are currently seeking treatment. None of the families mentioned family violence as a threat to their well-being.

On health needs, respondents noted receiving services in ten separate health settings. The South End Health Center was indicated by almost half of the sample (N=12). Sixteen respondents noted that they went alone to the health settings because these settings had bilingual capabilities. Two respondents indicated they always went with some family member for language and moral support.

Police and Library Services

In the first interview, twelve respondents indicated they felt comfortable calling the police if needed; six others have had to call the police in the past. An additional six respondents who noted a reluctance to call the police raised issues of lack of trust and language barriers.

In the second interview, fourteen of the eighteen respondents indicated having visited their local library for books and other materials, its good/safe environment, and for self-improvement opportunities.

Latino Agencies

The second interview sought information on the cultural and linguistic accessibility of Hispanic social agencies. When asked if they felt Hispanic agencies could help families, fifteen respondents answered yes and three were not sure. Respondents identified five key Hispanic agencies they could turn to if in need (*Alianza Hispana, Case del Sol,* Cardinal Cushing Center, *Oficina Hispana,* and *Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion* (IBA). When questioned if they have ever used these agencies and would they recommend them to someone, the majority said yes. Eleven respondents said they have used these agencies for ESL, GED classes, housing services, and family support groups, and would consider using them in the future. Ten stated that they would recommend the Latino organizations to others.

Respondents were also asked how key Latino community institutions/agencies play a role in educating Puerto Rican youth. The majority of the responses (N=14) highlighted these organizations' recreational and social programs that reach out to engage youth in productive activities that provide a safe and supportive environment. More specifically, respondents noted the need to better coordinate activities between the two systems, to

develop after-school programs that follow up on what is covered in school-homework, to provide tutoring, and to better integrate social services within the school for both students and their families. Four of the respondents, however, could not identify any role for community institutions.

PATTERNS OF SEEKING HELP FROM NATURAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Respondents were asked in the first interview to list all of the people they considered to be their primary support (individuals whom they can count on to be of help at anytime). Respondents indicated that their primary support comes from one to two persons who are close family members. Although they know their next door neighbors, most families (N=17) do not feel comfortable seeking their assistance. Although religion is a support system for a sizeable number of families (N=12) and fulfills important spiritual needs, only one family noted a religious leader as part of their support system. Few of the families use merchant/social clubs to meet a variety of informational, expressive, and instrumental needs (N=6).

Respondent Definition of Natural Support Systems

The final interview examined how respondents defined natural support systems. The responses proved quite revealing about the role of culture in the helping process. The majority noted that natural support systems were cultural-bound (traditional) ways of helping others -- family and non-family. These systems provide a mechanism that allows individuals to both receive and give aid without fearing shame or embarrassment. Said one respondent "It is our duty to both help and be helped." Another noted "Our Puerto Rican culture has taught us that we must share responsibility for our family, friends, and neighbor's well being." Three of the respondents, however, could not define what natural support systems are.

Role of Biological Fathers

In the third set of interviews, respondents were asked about the role of the biological fathers. This question was not asked earlier in the study due to its sensitive nature. The responses to this question contribute to a better understanding of family support systems.

Only five of sixteen respondents indicated that the fathers still played an active and supportive role in their children's lives. Three others maintained minimal contact, and eight fathers had no contact with their children. Of these eight, two were in prison, two were in substance abuse treatment programs, and four were not locatable or were in unknown locations. In short, most of the sample consisted of female-headed households without any means of support from spouses.

Views of Natural Support System Respondent

The responses from the natural support system interviews were very revealing about how requests for assistance are made and how help is given. Individuals in support systems provided an extensive array of assistance in two major categories: Instrumental and Expressive.

1. ***Instrumental Role.*** Almost all (N=12) of the support system respondents indicated that they provide the families in this study with financial assistance (giving or lending money), provide child care (particularly during emergencies), and provide food (particularly when food stamps are late in arriving). They also provide interpreter services (N=10) and information such about public assistance regulations, school meetings, and so on (N=8).

2. ***Expressive Role.*** Counseling about family programs, acting out children, and emotional support were the most frequently cited services (N=14). Referrals to folk healers (N=7) and helping to increase participation in community events (N=6) were also prominently noted by the respondents as services they provide to members of these informal support networks..

The respondents indicated that they not only provided assistance but were also recipients of assistance. In essence, the relationship was reciprocal in nature. The support systems took great pride in helping and noted that they found themselves very much in the same social-economic predicaments as the families in our study. Sharing similar circumstances facilitated communication but limited how much help could be provided.

Religion

The first interview included several questions on the role of religion in the lives of the Puerto Rican families in this study. Twenty families indicated they were religious -- 14 Catholic and six Pentecostal. Eleven of these families indicated they were religious prior to leaving Puerto Rico. Families selected their current house of worship as a result of an interplay of several factors -- proximity, priests/pastors speaking Spanish, and family members attending the institution. Nine families attended religious services on a weekly basis, one attended twice per week, one bi-weekly, and three monthly. The remaining six respondents indicated that they attended infrequently.

All who indicated a religious affiliation noted that they attended religious services with their families. In essence, it was a family activity. Eighteen said that they had no difficulty attending services because they either were within walking distance or had their own transportation. They attended religious services for a wide range of personal reasons -- because they encountered nice people, the minister was inspirational, family members also attended, it was a place for meditation, or the services provided an opportunity to interact with significant people in their lives. Eight families have either changed religions or churches since their arrival in the United States. Only five respondents noted that they had family members who attended different houses of worship.

When asked how religious institutions and schools might work together to help youth, eleven respondents stated that youth programs (recreational) and counseling could be jointly offered and sponsored. Two respondents stated that these two institutions should never work together because of the need for separation of state and religion. Five did not have any ideas on how collaborations could be arranged between these two systems.

Folk Healers

In the first interview, seven respondents stated they had participated or currently participate in spiritual rituals, and one stated that she was a medium. Six respondents indicated that they had close family members who have sought or are currently seeking the services of a folk healer. Two of the natural support interviewees stated they were mediums. Two respondents, however, indicated that they had negative experiences as a result of patronizing the services of folk healers.

Merchant/Social Clubs

Participants were asked where they shopped for groceries and whether they could obtain credit at the stores. Respondents shop regularly in six grocery stores scattered across a large geographical area. Two establishments, however, were mentioned the most often. Seven respondents identified a grocery store located in Chelsea, a considerable distance from the community being studied; eight mentioned a store in Roxbury, a neighborhood not too far from the geographical area being studied. Participants said that low prices, availability of native foods, and Spanish-speaking staff were the primary reasons for patronizing these establishments.

The third interview included a question to better understand if respondents could obtain credit at local food stores. Three respondents indicated that they could not obtain credit, but fourteen respondents stated they could, although only five have used this privilege. Four respondents said they have not done so because of fear of getting into debt.

Ten respondents indicated that they used the services of botanical shops (the cultural variation of a pharmacy) to buy perfumes, medicine products, or to obtain a consultation on an ailment. No respondent indicated belonging to a social club, although children did participate in baseball leagues and other team sports sponsored by local Latino institutions and grocery stores.

IV. BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

The final interview asked respondents about the impact of their participation in this study. All of the respondents indicated that they found participation rewarding and satisfactory. Several mentioned that the study provided an opportunity to have their voices heard; one respondent noted that to the best of her recollection, this is the only time any person in "authority" had ever asked her for an opinion.

Responses indicated the interest of families or untapped opportunities for families to play active and important roles in bettering communications and relationships between schools and their communities. Six respondents indicated that participation in the study made them think about their culture and why it is so important to them; two respondents stated that

participation made them think about education for their children and themselves, namely that education requires planning and not wishing. One respondent indicated that being a part of the interview process allowed her to assess how well she communicated about sensitive topics.

On their natural support systems, eight indicated that participation in the study reinforced the importance of having family, friends, and neighbors they could turn to and not take for granted. One respondent said: "You just never think about what you have and how fortunate I am to have family and friends I can turn to when in need." Another respondent commented on the importance of having members of their natural support system interviewed: "They, too, are part of this study."

V. ANALYSIS

This section consists of four parts that integrate the professional literature with the data collected: (1) An overview of key themes; (2) Setting a community context (Puerto Rico and Boston); (3) Help-seeking patterns with an emphasis on natural support systems; and (4) School and career aspirations. We then discuss the conditions and characteristics that make a responsive school.

OVERVIEW OF KEY THEMES

The data suggest that the Puerto Rican families in this study do not fit neatly into preconceived categories about Latinos in the professional literature (Hurtado, 1995).

Challenge of Maintaining A Sample

A sizable sample of Puerto Rican families was hard to obtain, even with the cooperation of a school principal and teachers. Much information in school files is either dated, in error, or simply missing. Upon meeting with the principal and describing our difficulties in contacting potential families, he stated that our rate of contact was better than many of the school's efforts. These difficulties have been reported by other researchers in the

field (Marin and Marin, 1991; Rogler and Cooney, 1984). Similar experiences have been noted in the social service literature (Alers, 1978; Becerra and Greenblatt, 1983; Miranda and Kitanl, 1986). The difficulty in maintaining a sample has large implications for any school-based or community-based research that specifically targets Puerto Ricans, although similar observations can be made for other Latino groups, particularly those who are undocumented.

Nature and Extent of Natural Support Systems

The degree of social isolation of the families was unexpected. As noted, the average Puerto Rican family in our sample had 1.3 individuals in their natural support system that they could count on in an emergency. This number is low and probably reflects the interplay of several key factors: (1) the role of acculturation and a de-emphasis on culture; (2) the tremendous stress that entire natural support systems are currently under -- very little energy and extra resources to help others; and (3) the inability of any support system to meet all of the needs of our families.

The professional literature highlights the importance of family, folk healers, religion and merchant/social clubs as sources of support (Delgado and Humm-Delgado, 1982). However, with the exception of a few family members, our sample doesn't have an extensive support system. Religion was a pleasant surprise. More families than expected participated in their community churches, usually with their families. However, religious institutions were primarily meeting spiritual needs and not expressive or instrumental needs.

The Boston Foundation's Persistent Poverty Project (1989) undertook a study in Boston focused on Latinos and other communities of color and found that Puerto Ricans/Latinos, although in need of social services, were not in fact receiving them. This finding held true even when focusing on Latino community-based human service organizations. The isolation from needed formal services further compounded difficult living situations for this sample.

Families Plan to Stay in the United States

The families in this sample do not have plans to return to Puerto Rico. This may be the result of acculturation and a realistic understanding of how difficult it is to make it

economically in Puerto Rico. The longer the families stay in the United States, the more difficult it will be for their children to move back to Puerto Rico, even though the children in the sample are currently in bilingual programs. In addition, because most of the families are receiving some form of public assistance, it will be very difficult to move back to Puerto Rico and compete in the job market (Rodriguez, 1991). This sense of staying is new and may reflect new national trends (Ortiz, 1995).

Importance of School in the Lives of Children and Families

The importance of the school in the lives of the children and their families cannot be overstated (Ryan & Adams, 1995). The school played a prominent part in helping these families address a multitude of needs. Parents had very good feelings for school personnel and very often displayed a willingness to get involved in school-related activities. The families' comfort level with the school was most impressive and highlighted a potential source of support for connecting them to other services. In short, the school was one of the few institutions, in addition to the church, that served to assist Puerto Rican families in great need.

Setting a Community Context

A significant number of questions were devoted to defining and better understanding the concept of "community" in Puerto Rico and Boston. Defining community, however, is no easy task, as noted by Effrat (1974, p.1): "Trying to study community is like trying to scoop jello with your fingers. You can get hold of some, but there's always more slipping away from you." Simply stated, community is a critical intersecting point between individuals and the greater society.

Warren and Lyon (1988), Warren and Warren (1977), Rubin and Rubin (1992), and others have stressed that a community may be one, several, or all of the following types: (1) geographical; (2) ethnic/cultural, including socio-economic class characteristics (solidarity); (3) psychological, including a strong identity and sense of belonging through a shared history; and (4) physical -- a concentration of facilities, including institutions such as houses of worship, parks, and malls that bring people together in common activities. These types influence how communities perceive and identify themselves.

A sense of community is found when people feel as if they belong to and are part of a group. This sense of belonging includes an awareness that others will "care," and that the individual has a responsibility to care for others. Furthermore, a sense of community engenders meaning and connectedness. Inclusion in a community enables members to create a shared history and common destiny (Allen and Allen, 1987).

In our data, Puerto Ricans in the study sample define community along ethnic and psychological dimensions. This presents a unique set of challenges in a society where geography most often defines community. Respondents indicated a degree of attachment to their current geographic community, but this attachment was not strong, particularly because safety concerns were ever present. Community was defined as a place where their support systems "lived."

HELP-SEEKING PATTERNS FROM FORMAL AND NATURAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

A group's natural support system is greatly influenced by its beliefs, history, traditions about helping its members as opposed to assistance from outsiders or formal support systems, and by the lack of available resources in the larger society (Weber, 1982). In the case of Puerto Ricans, the resources lacking in the larger society include Spanish-speaking staff and culture-specific services. Consequently, the involvement of natural support systems within a comprehensive rubric of resources and services constitutes a help-options network.

Social network and natural support concepts can be applied to the individual, the family, the group, the network, and the community. Research questions addressed three key aspects of natural support systems: (1) neighbors; (2) religion; and (3) botanical shops and *bodegas* (indigenous institutions). This sample's responses to these questions revealed that natural support systems were not as extensive as expected.

The data on neighbors reflected a degree of isolation (less than half knew their neighbors). Of the respondents who indicated they knew their neighbors (N=8), no one mentioned a neighbor as a person with whom they felt comfortable discussing personal/family problems. Respondents stated they felt comfortable seeking assistance from neighbors for instrumental, informational, or problem-solving needs.

Religion proved to be a greater support than neighbors (12 out of 18 mentioned they attended services). The sample reflected a high percentage of Protestant sects (five indicated they were Pentecostal). There is a growing body of literature analyzing the important role of religion in the lives of Puerto Ricans in the United States (Caroballo, 1990; Delgado and Humm-Delgado, 1982; Sanchez, 1987; Sanchez-Ayendez, 1988). The influence of Pentecostalism and other fundamentalist groups such as Seventh Day Adventist and Jehovah's Witnesses has been growing rapidly within this Latino group (Fitzpatrick, 1987). The popular press has captured the growing movement of Protestant denominations within the Latino community in general, and the Puerto Rican community in particular (Rohter, 1985).

Puerto Rican merchant establishments can be described as community-based institutions that provide products and services that have a cultural context. These establishments are owned, staffed, and patronized by the community. These institutions are attractive to the community because they minimize geographical, linguistic, and cultural barriers to service utilization (Delgado, 1994).

Unfortunately, the literature on merchant establishments has primarily focused on grocery stores, known in Spanish as *bodegas* or *colmados* (Agins, 1985; Howe, 1986; Vazquez, 1974). Botanical shops (Borrello & Mathias, 1977; Spencer-Molloy, 1994) and restaurants (Hernandez, 1994; Raynor, 1991; Stout, 1988) have received scant attention.

Merchant establishments provide a variety of social support services that supplement their primary commercial interests. These establishments offer at least seven key services to the Puerto Rican community: (1) counseling (Agins, 1985; Vazquez, 1974; (2) cultural connectedness to homeland (Rohter, 1985; Raynor, 1991; Rierden, 1992; Vazquez, 1974; (3) assistance in filling out or interpreting government forms (Howe, 1986; Vazquez, 1974); (4) community-related news and information (Agins, 1985; Korrol, 1983; Terry, 1992); (5) information and referral to social services agencies (Howe, 1986; Vazquez, 1974); (6) credit (Agins, 1985; Fitzpatrick, 1987); and (7) banking/check cashing (Fitzpatrick, 1987; Howe, 1986).

Although merchant establishments were mentioned by the respondents in the study, they were not playing an active and significant role in their lives or in school-related matters. This does not mean that these institutions cannot be enlisted in collaborative activities with local schools. For this to occur, however, it would be necessary for families to approach merchant establishments to ask them to collaborate with their children's schools. Families

could play the role of "broker" between schools and merchant establishments in Latino communities.

School and Career Aspirations

The data on school and career aspirations for Puerto Rican children contradicts common stereotypes concerning low-income Puerto Rican female-headed households. The overwhelming majority of parents wanted their children to graduate from college and become professionals. Parents were well aware of the barriers their children need to overcome to succeed. However, they listed their children's positive qualities, indicating the children's resilience in difficult situations.

The concept of resiliency is not new to education and human services (Rutter, 1987). Resiliency provides a dramatically different alternative to current conceptualizations of risk. Some individuals within a family or community are resilient and able to cope successfully, whereas others cannot. The literature on resiliency notes that high self-esteem, cultural pride, and the presence of social supports are key elements in helping individuals surmount life's trials and tribulations (Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1991). Consequently, how people perceive and respond to problems is affected by how they feel about themselves and by the presence of resources such as natural support systems that can be used to solve or minimize problems in and out of school.

Conditions and Characteristics That Make for a Responsive School

The Puerto Rican Natural Support Systems Study addressed many issues and perspectives on how to improve school-family-community relations. Data were obtained on a variety of factors that facilitate interaction among these three important contexts. Connections are increased when geographical, psychological, logistical and cultural factors are taken into consideration by schools.

Geographical Accessibility

The geographical location of the Blackstone Community School played a critical role in helping to foster the participation of parents and their families in school. Its location in the South End, right in the middle of a large Puerto Rican community, minimized barriers that are built when families have to take buses to their children's school. In addition, the school can more easily develop programs with, outreach to, and interact with key Puerto Rican/Latino institutions, formal as well as natural support. In this study, geographical accessibility facilitated families' interactions with the school. Although proximity is no guarantee of increased participation and school-community events/activities, it certainly helped the families in our study visit classrooms, drop off children, and engage in school events.

Psychological Accessibility

The dimension of psychological accessibility refers to: (1) cleanliness of the school building (internal and external); (2) encouragement of participation (events such as celebrations, correspondence, volunteer opportunities, workshops) to convey a sense of openness and welcoming to Puerto Rican families; (3) conduct of business in a manner that is friendly yet respectful of parents; (4) visibility of school authorities in the community through visits and participation in community events; and (5) opportunities to communicate in the language of preference, i.e., Spanish, and not to fear being shamed or misunderstood. These "psychological" factors translate into what one parent said about the school: "This is our school and we are proud to say that!"

Logistical Accessibility

Schools accessible to the community must have hours and days of operation that lend themselves to serving the needs of that community. In short, they may need to function beyond an 8 A.M. to 3 P.M. schedule, five days per week. The Blackstone School has a schedule that supports a wide range of activities. The provision of space for parent/community meetings during non-school hours, for example, is one way that this school maximizes family contact and participation.

Cultural Accessibility

There is no question that having a school that validates the culture of its students is one means of bringing about closer collaboration with families and the community. Parents in our study indicated that schools must be cognizant of natural support systems and cultural traditions of helping. Schools, as a result, should include these systems and traditions as part of social studies and as a means of increasing family involvement. Cultural accessibility also involves the following: celebrating Puerto Rican holidays at school; hiring teachers and staff who are bilingual and bicultural; decorating school areas with Puerto Rican symbols such as maps and key historical figures; providing opportunities for parents to come and share with children their cultural heritage; and making an effort to involve school personnel in community institutions and festivities.

VI. SUMMARY

The following findings reflect the struggles of undertaking urban-based research as well as the resiliency of low-income Puerto Rican families:

1. The project experienced a tremendous challenge in contacting and following a cohort of Latino families over a two-year period of time. The families were highly mobile, changed telephone numbers, and were difficult to reach. It was necessary to develop active outreach strategies, including paying each family $25.00 per interview.

2. The natural support systems of our families are very limited, averaging 1.3 persons per family. This low score was unexpected. Most families do not have an extensive social network of helpers even though many are in tremendous need of resources.

3. The families in our sample have no plans to return to Puerto Rico to live, although many have very fond and romantic memories of Puerto Rico.

4. Families do not define neighborhood in the conventional geographic way. Instead, ethnic and psychological definitions prevail. This has important implications for how schools and human service organizations reach out to the community.

5. Families have high expectations for their children's achievement in school and in post-secondary education. The overwhelming majority of families want their children to graduate from high school and obtain some post-secondary education. Families are very quick to identify their children's strengths, academically and socially; in addition, they are very cognizant of the barriers children face in obtaining a quality education in public schools.

6. Not all members of Puerto Rican natural support systems play influential roles in the lives of the families in this study. There is no doubt that "family" is central to any support system, followed by religion. However, folk healers and merchant/social clubs are not active in helping these families' children achieve in school. Neighbors are rarely involved in helping families deal with crises.

7. Most of the families are not receiving social services. Those who are generally seek assistance from Latino organizations, with the notable exceptions of health centers and libraries.

8. Puerto Rican families in this sample, with no exceptions, identified the Blackstone School as a major resource in their lives. In essence, their children's school is considered by many as part of their support system. School personnel, including the principal, teachers and teacher aides have been receptive to families and have been able to "connect" in a supportive manner. They become part of a natural system by going "on and beyond" their job responsibilities.

9. Puerto Rican families have embraced the concept of collaboration between community and schools as a means of bringing together resources to help children and their families.

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